

**STATEMENT OF KATHERINE H. STEVENSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS AND STEWARDSHIP, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PARKS, RECREATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION, SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 669, TO PROVIDE FOR THE ACQUISITION OF THE PLAINS RAILROAD DEPOT AT THE JIMMY CARTER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.**

**May 21, 1997**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to offer the Department of the Interior's views on S. 669, a bill to amend the Act of December 23, 1987 (P. L. 100-206), that established the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District to authorize the acquisition of the Plains Railroad Depot by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, exchange, or other means.

We strongly support this legislation, and we recommend its enactment.

The Plains Railroad Depot, which was built in 1888, served as the headquarters for Jimmy Carter's successful 1976 presidential campaign. The depot is cited in the act that established the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District as one of four cultural resources that has significant historical association with the 39th President of the United States. The railroad depot is an integral part of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District, which also includes the boyhood home of Jimmy Carter, the Plains High School, and the Carter compound. The Jimmy Carter National Historic Site tends to have especially heavy visitation from school groups and in 1990, the depot alone had 34,822 visitors.

During the 1976 presidential campaign, the depot figured prominently in media coverage and became

closely associated with Jimmy Carter, the candidate. The campaign itself was remarkable in that it succeeded in bringing a largely unknown contender to the attention of the entire country.

Although the Plains Historic Preservation Trust donated the depot structure to the National Park Service in 1988, the 0.19 acre tract on which the depot stands remains in private ownership. M.L. Hudson conveyed an easement for railroad purposes to the railroad company, which is now CSX. No conveyance of the underlying fee title took place. The city of Plains and the National Park Service have sought for several years to resolve the question of property ownership, but we have been unable to determine the heirs of the original landowner.

Under current law the Secretary is authorized to acquire the land on which the depot stands only through donation. This restriction prevents the National Park Service from acquiring the property; and because the National Park Service does not own the property on which the depot stands, we are unable to connect the facility to the city sewer system or to provide visitor parking, sidewalks or access to the building for the disabled. S. 669 would release the donation restriction on the acquisition of the property and would allow the National Park Service to clear title to the property by other means of acquisition including a quiet title action, and to compensate the owners should they be located.

Despite the constraints imposed by the fact that the land is not in Federal ownership, we have been able to move forward with the development of the depot structure into a museum. This progress is due, in large part, to a partnership between the National Park Service and an organization of collectors of political memorabilia. This 80-member organization, called the Carter Political Items

Collectors (CPIC), is a subchapter of a much larger group, the American Political Items Collectors, who is interested in American political history.

The partnership began two years ago when President Carter suggested that the CPIC assist the National Park Service with the project of converting the railroad depot into a museum. Efforts are well underway to establish in the depot fourteen exhibits and two audiovisual programs focusing on key events in President Carter's journey through the national primaries, caucuses, Democratic convention and the general election. We will also highlight the major role the small railroad depot played in the 1976 presidential campaign.

Because of the success of the partnership with CPIC, this project will be completed at a cost of approximately \$50,000 instead of \$512,000 which was the cost estimate included in the General Management Plan for the site. We expect to host the opening of the depot museum on September 27th of this year.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I will be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.